Chapter I. Antonio Gramsci's Concept of the Subaltern

In this chapter, I would build a framework for the study of “Representation of Subaltern Pasts: A Study of Modern Indian Fiction in English and in English Translation” by way of a review of Gramsci’s theory of the subaltern and the scholarship on this theory. Gramsci lists six phases of the development of a subaltern group from a primitive position to the position of autonomy. I would also study how Gramsci’s concept of the subaltern is closely linked to his concept of hegemony. Recent interpretations of the concept of the subaltern will be studied next. In these recent interpretations, I would mainly focus on the Subaltern Studies Collective and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The study of modern Indian fiction in English and in English translation would be carried out in the light of Gramsci’s theory of the subaltern and his theory of hegemony.

I. The Composition and Organization of the Prison Notebooks

Antonio Gramsci’s prison writings consist of thirty-three notebooks. Political, cultural, philosophical, historical, and literary topics are discussed in twenty-nine of these notebooks, and the remaining four notebooks are translations of German texts. The notebooks were not written in sequence. Gramsci made entries in different notebooks at the same time. Many notes appear in two different versions in separate notebooks. Gramsci crossed out the earlier version of the note whenever he elaborated on it. The notes that are crossed out can still be read. Gramsci’s notes do not have definitive status and remain provisional. Gramsci had no intention of publishing these notes. The notes are basically fragmentary, and imposing an order on the text would amount to doing violence to the text (Buttigieg 1: ix-x). There were two main topics on which Gramsci’s writing focused. The first topic was the analysis of the social, economic, and cultural conditions in Italy which led to the rise of Fascism, and the second topic was making the PCd’I (the Italian Communist Party) an effective oppositional movement by “producing intelligent and thorough critical analyses of fascism, by heightening the political consciousness of workers, by forging alliances with other exploited groups (the peasants, in particular), and by strengthening Party unity through a coherent articulation of its theoretical position, its strategies, and its goals” (Buttigieg 1: 21). Gramsci focused his attention on the role of intellectuals to understand the nature of fascism and the socio-political
conditions in Italy which led to its emergence. Gramsci wrote "Some Aspects of the Southern Question" just before his arrest. This essay deals with Gramsci's key ideas which he developed later in his prison writings. His theory on the role of intellectuals and his concept of hegemony were first discussed in this essay (21).

It is very important to understand the way in which Gramsci composed, and organized his notebooks. After Gramsci's trial in Rome, Gramsci was sent to a prison at Turi di Bari. Before sending Gramsci to prison, the prosecutor had said "We must prevent this brain from functioning for twenty years" (16). While in prison, Gramsci realized that he could continue his political activity through intellectual labour only. For Gramsci, intellectual activity was also a form of political action (16-17). Gramsci obtained permission to write in his prison cell. Tatiana Schucht, Gramsci's sister-in-law, kept sending books and journals to Gramsci so that he could write in his cell. Gramsci had to exercise caution as the jailers kept constant watch over everything Gramsci wrote. While writing, Gramsci was attentive to the prison seal, and the warden's signature on the notebooks. In order to escape prison censor, Gramsci used circumlocution and rhetorical strategies. Lenin was referred to as Ilyich, and Trotsky was referred to as Bronstein. Gramsci started writing in June 1929 (24-25). In his prison writings, Gramsci stresses the provisional character of his notes and points out that some of them may contain errors. In Notebook 4, §16, Gramsci comments on the nature of the notes. Gramsci observes that his notes are "provisional and written as they flow from the pen: they must be reviewed and checked in detail because they undoubtedly contain imprecisions, anachronisms, wrong approaches, etc. which do not imply wrongdoing because the notes have solely the function of quick memoranda" (33). As Gramsci's health deteriorated, efforts were made to obtain his release. Fascist authorities wanted Gramsci to submit a petition for clemency on his behalf, but Gramsci refused to bend. Gramsci suffered a near total collapse on 7 March 1933. Gramsci was transferred to a prison at Formia where the living conditions were better than they had been at the Turi prison. He resumed his writing within two months. Still, Gramsci's health remained a cause for concern. After Gramsci suffered a severe setback, he was shifted to the Cusumano clinic in Rome. Gramsci could not add to his notes later, and the project was left unfinished (38-39).
II. The Subaltern

“Subaltern” is a British word for someone of inferior rank, and combines the Latin terms for “under” (sub) and “other” (alter) (Abrams 237). The term, subaltern, refers to those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 215). “Subaltern” serves as a coded way of referring to classes such as the peasantry and the working class—social classes other than the ruling class (Hawthorn 345).

1. Methodological Criteria for the History of Subaltern Classes

In Notebook 3, §90, Gramsci makes a distinction between the history of the ruling classes and the history of the subaltern classes. The history of states is basically the history of the ruling classes. Their history is also marked by the unification of the ruling classes, whereas the history of the subaltern classes does not have its own domain, but is interwoven with the history of civil society. As opposed to the ruling classes, the history of the subaltern classes is marked by the lack of unity. The unity of the ruling classes is found in the state, and “their history is essentially the history of states. . . . For the subaltern classes, the unification does not occur; their history is intertwined with the history of “civil society”; it is a disjointed history” (91). Gramsci lays down the methodological criteria for the study of the history of subaltern classes:

1) The objective formation of the subaltern classes through the developments and changes that took place in the economic sphere; the extent of their diffusion; and their descent from other classes that preceded them;
2) Their passive or active adherence to the dominant political formations; that is, their efforts to influence the programs of these formations with demands of their own;
3) The birth of new parties of the ruling class to maintain control of the subaltern classes;
4) The formations of the subaltern classes themselves, formations of a limited and partial character;
5) The political formations that assert the autonomy of the subaltern classes, but within the old framework;
6) The political formations that assert complete autonomy, etc. (91)

The six phases that Gramsci lists show the development of a subaltern group from a primitive position to the position of autonomy. For Gramsci, there could be "intermediate phases or combinations of several phases." The task of the historian is to record the development of the subaltern class from the most primitive phase to the one of complete autonomy. The history of a political party of the subaltern classes is very complex as it takes into account the effect of the activities of the party on all the subaltern classes as a group. There is usually one subaltern group which exercises hegemony over other subaltern groups: "Among these classes, one will exercise a hegemony; this must be established by studying the developments of all the other parties as well, insofar as they include elements of the hegemonic class or of the other subaltern classes that are subject to its hegemony" (91). Gramsci depicts the development of the bourgeoisie as a subaltern class. The bourgeoisie consolidated itself in the state by fighting antagonistic forces and by obtaining the active or passive consent of the other forces. Gramsci states that the Italian bourgeoisie could not unite the people, and therefore suffered defeat and failed to reach the phase of complete autonomy: "In the Risorgimento, too, this narrow "egoism" prevented a quick and vigorous revolution like the French one. This is one of the most important problems and one of the causes of difficulties in producing the history of the subaltern classes" (91-92). In Notebook 3, §14, Gramsci comments on the fragmentary nature of the history of the subaltern classes:

The history of the subaltern classes is necessarily fragmented and episodic; in the activity of these classes there is a tendency toward unification, albeit in provisional stages, but this is the least conspicuous aspect, and it manifests itself only when victory is secured. Subaltern classes are subject to the initiatives of the dominant class, even when they rebel; they are in a state of anxious defense. Every trace of autonomous initiative is of inestimable value. In any case, the monograph is the most suitable form for this history, which requires a very large accumulation of fragmentary materials. (21)

2. David Lazzaretti's Political Movement: a Case of Subaltern History

In Notebook 3, §12, Gramsci refers to an article by Domenico Bulferetti in which Bulferetti mentions the books published on David Lazzaretti's life. Gramsci is especially
critical of the way in which David Lazzaretti's movement was represented by Italian intellectuals. Italian intellectuals refused to acknowledge this movement as a religious and political movement, and called David Lazzaretti a madman. Joseph A. Buttigieg describes David Lazzaretti's life:

Davide (or David) Lazzaretti (1834-78) was born in Arcidosso, in the Monte Amiata region, a remote area in the southwestern corner of Tuscany. He fought as a volunteer in the national army in 1860 and was a carter by trade. In 1868, he experienced religious visions, underwent a spiritual conversion, and adopted the life of a hermit. His visions revealed to him that he was a descendant of a French king and that a prophet would come who would free all peoples from despotism and misery. Lazzaretti found many admirers and followers mostly but not exclusively in his region, and he established a number of colonies, or congregations. Twice, in 1871 and 1873, the authorities brought charges against him, but he was never convicted. Eventually, Lazzaretti convinced himself and his followers that he was the messiah of the new order. In his view, the Kingdom of Grace (i.e., the pontificate of Pius IX, who died in February 1878) was coming to an end; it would be followed by the Kingdom of Justice, which in turn would give way to the Reform of the Holy Ghost, namely, the millennium. He was shot dead by the carabinieri when he ceremoniously came down from the mountain near Arcidosso to present himself to the crowds as the messiah and to proclaim the establishment of the republic of God. (Buttigieg 2: 416)

Barzellotti's book attributes the causes of Lazzaretti's movement to his state of mind, and his culture. Commenting on Barzellotti's book, Gramsci observes that the book is an expression of "the "patriotic" tendency that spawned the efforts to conceal the causes of the general discontent that existed in Italy by providing narrow, individualistic, pathologic, etc., explanations of single explosive incidents" (Buttigieg 2:19). Gramsci draws a parallel between David Lazzeretti's movement and the "brigandage" of the South and Sicily (19). The movements of the subaltern classes are not given their due because the socio-political context of these movements is not analyzed by these writers. These movements are often depicted as aberrations and deviations from mainstream history. Marcus Green writes: "Lazzaretti and his movement represent an attempt by a subaltern
The case of Lazzaretti also represents an instance in which a subaltern group was politically organized and historically traceable, yet failed in its political ascent due to the power of the state” (13).

3. The Development of Medieval Communes: a Case of Subaltern History

The development of medieval communes represents a case of a subaltern group becoming a dominant group. It represents the fourth, fifth and sixth phases of the development of the subaltern group (Green 12-13). In Notebook 3, §16, Gramsci refers to Ettore Ciccotti’s essay in which Ciccotti describes the historical development of the popular class in the communes. The wars among these communes “created the need to assemble stronger and bigger military forces, allowing as many people as possible to bear arms. This gave commoners an awareness of their own power and consolidated their ranks (in other words, it helped stimulate the formation of parties)” (22). Societies were formed by the commoners. These societies protected the commune from external threats and also protected the commoners from the assault of the nobles. The formation of these societies represents the fourth phase of the development of the subaltern class in which the subaltern class forms itself in a limited or partial manner. Later, these societies created councils and appointed officers. The importance of these societies grew in time, and they became integral parts of the commune system. Nobles as well as commoners joined these societies. Later, however, the nobles kept themselves apart. As the movement grew stronger, the commoners started demanding and gaining participation in the public offices. The people formed a real political party, and also elected a leader of their party. This is the fifth phase of the subaltern class in which the political formation of the subaltern class asserts its autonomy, but within the old framework. Later, Gramsci describes the sixth phase of the development of the subaltern class in which the subaltern class achieves complete autonomy:

When the people failed to obtain desired reforms from the commune authorities, they seceded, with support of prominent individuals from the commune, and after forming an independent assembly they began to create their own magistracies similar to the general systems of the commune, to award jurisdiction to the captain of the people, and to make decisions on their own authority, giving rise
(from 1255) to a whole legislative organization....The people, then, came to dominate the commune, overwhelming the previous ruling class.... (22-24)

In Notebook 1, §44, Gramsci analyzes the link between city and country in the history of the Communes. Commenting on this link, Gramsci observes: “the emerging bourgeoisie seeks allies among the peasants against the Empire and against its own local feudalism” (139). The bourgeoisie and the nobility competed for labour. For bourgeoisie, the labour could be provided by the rural classes only. The nobility wanted the peasants to work on their farms. The nobles could not capture the peasants as they ran away to the cities. During the era of the Communes, the city had a leading function as it made the internal struggles of the countryside more intense and used them as a politico-military weapon to pull down the structure of feudalism. Machiavelli also recognized “the need to forge links with the peasants in order to have a national militia that would eliminate mercenary companies . . .” (140).

4. Spontaneity and the History of Subaltern Classes

In Notebook 3, §48, Gramsci observes that pure spontaneity does not exist in history. Although the elements of conscious leadership exist in the most spontaneous of movements, these elements are difficult to trace as the subaltern classes do not leave verifiable documents: “One may say that the element of spontaneity is therefore characteristic of the “history of subaltern classes” and, especially, of the most marginal and peripheral elements of these classes, who have not attained a consciousness of the class per se . . .” (49). These classes do not leave any documentary evidence of their history because they do not think that their history would have any importance or value. There are multiple elements of conscious leadership in the movements of subaltern classes, but none of these elements predominates or goes beyond the level of “common sense” which Gramsci defines as “the traditional conception of the world of a given social stratum” (49). Gramsci states that the existence of conscious leadership is revealed by the presence of groups that endorse spontaneity as a method. Gramsci analyzes the Turin movement which was accused of being spontaneist and voluntarist at the same time. The movement got creative leadership. The leadership was not abstract. The leaders did not mechanically reproduce theoretical formulas. Politics was not confused with theoretical formulas. The leadership devoted itself to “real people in specific
historical relations, with specific sentiments, ways of life, fragments of worldviews, etc., that were outcomes of the "spontaneous" combinations of a given environment of material production with the "fortuitous" gathering of disparate social elements . . ." (50). The leadership did not ignore the element of spontaneity, but gave it a direction. The leaders’ emphasis on the spontaneity of the movement provided an element of unification to the movement: "it was, above all, a denial that anything having to do with the movement might be reckless, fake (or not historically necessary). It gave the masses a "theoretical" consciousness of themselves as creators of historical and institutional values, as founders of states" (51).

Commenting on spontaneity, Gramsci observes: "This unity of "spontaneity and "conscious leadership," or "discipline," is precisely the real political action of the subaltern classes, insofar as it is mass politics and not a mere adventure by groups that appeal to the masses" (51). Gramsci considers the question of the opposition between modern theory and the spontaneous sentiments of the masses. Gramsci argues that these two cannot be in opposition. There may be a quantitative difference between the two, but there is no qualitative difference. He cites examples of Kant and Marx. For Kant, his philosophical theories have to be in agreement with common sense, that is, the traditional popular conception of the world. In The Holy Family, Marx states that the political formulas of the French Revolution could be reduced to the principles of German philosophy.

Gramsci is critical of those who neglect and show hatred for "spontaneous" movements. If these movements are not given a conscious leadership and are not made political, bad consequences could follow: "It is almost always the case that a "spontaneous" movement of the subaltern classes is matched by a reactionary movement of the right wing of the dominant class" (51). Gramsci gives an example of an economic crisis which, on the one hand, could create discontent among the subaltern classes and on the other, the right wing of the dominant class may take advantage of the weakened state and may overthrow the government. Gramsci thinks that one must include "the failure of the responsible groups to give conscious leadership to spontaneous rebellions and thus enable them to become a positive political factor" (51) as a principal cause of these coup d’état. Gramsci argues that the example of the Sicilian vespers shows that it was a
spontaneous as well as a planned movement. The Sicilian vespers combined prior planning and a spontaneous uprising of the Sicilian people against the oppression which people could not endure. Gramsci states that spontaneous movements could have both, positive as well as negative, results: "The "spontaneous" movements of the broadest popular strata make it possible for the most advanced subaltern class to come to power because of the objective enfeeblement of the state. Again, this is a "progressive" example, but, in the modern world, the regressive examples are more frequent" (52). Gramsci is implicitly referring to the rise of Fascism, of Mussolini, which was a result of the weakened state. For Gramsci, only that movement is authentic which is fully conscious, and is governed by a pre-established plan or abstract theory, but at the same time he is also aware that such movements are rare. Bizarre coincidences are found in abundance. Gramsci writes: "it is the theoretician's task to find in this bizarreness new evidence for his theory, to "translate" the elements of historical life into theoretical language, but not vice versa, making reality conform to an abstract scheme. Reality will never conform to an abstract scheme . . ." (52).

5. Role of Intellectuals in Subaltern History

In Notebook 4, §49, Gramsci analyzes the role of intellectuals in the history of subaltern classes. Gramsci broadly divides intellectuals into two classes: organic intellectuals and traditional intellectuals. Commenting on organic intellectuals, Gramsci states:

Every social group coming into existence on the primal basis of an essential function in the world of economic production creates together with itself, organically, a rank or several ranks of intellectuals who give it homogeneity and a consciousness of its own function in the economic sphere: the capitalist entrepreneur creates along with himself the economist, the scientist of political economy. Moreover, it is the case that every entrepreneur is also an intellectual in the sense that he must possess a certain technical capacity, not only in the narrowly defined field of economics but in other fields as well—at least those fields closest to economic production (he must be an organizer of masses of men; he must be an organizer of the "confidence" of the investors in his business, of the buyers of his products, etc.) If not all the entrepreneurs, at least an elite among
them must have the technical capacity (of an intellectual nature) to be organizers
of society in general, including its whole complex body of services right up to the
state, in order to obtain the most favorable conditions for the expansion of their
own group or at least the capacity to choose the “underlings” who are specialists
in this activity of organizing general relations beyond the ambit of the business.

(199)

The second category of intellectuals is that of traditional intellectuals. This
category of intellectuals shows a historical continuity despite the changes occurring in
social and political forms. The most typical example of this category is that of the
ecclesiastics “who for a long time monopolized a number of important services (religious
ideology, schools and education, and “theory” in general with regard to science,
philosophy, morals, justice, etc., as well as charity and good works, etc.)” (199). There
are certain categories of intellectuals that are on a par with the aristocracy. Gramsci
observes that the clergy exercised the feudal ownership of land in the same way as the
nobility, and it was economically equal to the nobility. There existed “an aristocracy of
the gown, in addition to an aristocracy of the sword” (200). Gramsci adds the industrial
technicians and “applied” scientists to the category of economists who come into
existence with the entrepreneurs. Gramsci states: “Since these categories experience the
continuity of their intellectual title through an “esprit de corps” . . . they thus appear to
have a certain autonomy from the dominant social group, and taken as a whole they seem
like an independent social group with its own characteristics, etc.” (200). Later, Gramsci
considers the meaning of the term “intellectual”. Gramsci thinks that it is difficult to
distinguish the activities of intellectuals from the activities of other social groups: “The
most widespread methodological error, it seems to me, has been to look for the essential
characteristic in the intrinsic nature of activity rather than in the system of relations
wherein this activity (and the group that personifies it) is located within the general
ensemble of social relations” (200). The worker is not characterized by physical labour,
but special social conditions in which he works. For Gramsci, pure manual labour does
not exist. A minimum of technical skill is required in any physical work.

The relationship between intellectuals and production is not direct, but is
mediated by two types of social organization:
a) by civil society, that is, by the ensemble of private organizations in society; b) by the state. The intellectuals have a function in the “hegemony” that is exercised throughout society by the dominant group and in the “domination” over society embodied by the state, and this function is precisely organizational and connective. The intellectuals have the function of organizing the social hegemony of a group and that group’s domination of the state; in other words, they have the function of organizing the consent that comes from the prestige attached to the function in the world of production and the apparatus of coercion for those groups who do not “consent” either actively or passively or for those moments of crisis of command and leadership when spontaneous consent undergoes a crisis . . . (201)

Gramsci observes that there are various levels of the organization of social hegemony and state domination. Some levels are purely physical or instrumental, for instance, carrying out orders rather than having responsibility. Nurses and doctors in a hospital, priests in a church and teachers in a school are the examples. In the case of extreme resistance, these levels of intellectual activity can result in difference in quality: “on the highest rung, we find the “creators” of the various sciences, philosophy, poetry etc.; on the lowest, the most humble “administrators and disseminators” of the intellectual wealth of the tradition—but taken as a whole, they all have a sense of solidarity” (201). Gramsci observes that the lower strata have a stronger sense of solidarity from which they “derive a certain “conceitedness” that frequently renders them vulnerable to taunts and jokes” (201).

Gramsci makes a further distinction between the urban and rural type of intellectuals. Commenting on the urban type of intellectuals, Gramsci writes: “Intellectuals of the urban type are rather closely tied to industry. They have the same function as subaltern officers in the army: they establish the relationship between the entrepreneur and the instrumental masses, they execute the production plan drawn by the general staff of industry” (201). Bringing the peasant masses into contact with the local and state administration is the function of the intellectuals of the rural type. Priest, lawyer, teacher, notary are the typical examples of the intellectuals of the rural type. Gramsci thinks that the function of this intellectual is of greater political importance. The
rural intellectual symbolizes a social model for the average peasant who wants to break free from his miserable social condition. The peasant wants at least one of his sons to become an intellectual to improve his economic condition. The peasant has an ambivalent attitude towards an intellectual; he likes and respects the social position of the intellectual, at the same time, he has a feeling of contempt for him. Commenting on the role of intellectuals in the subordination of peasants to intellectuals, Gramsci observes: “It is impossible to understand anything about the peasants without taking into consideration their effective subordination to the intellectuals and without grasping the fact that every development of the peasant masses to a certain extent is linked and depends on the movements of the intellectual” (202). As opposed to rural intellectuals, urban intellectuals like factory technicians do not exercise any political influence on the workers. The opposite can happen. The organic intellectuals of the workers can influence the technicians.

Gramsci throws light on the distinction between intellectuals as an organic category of every social group and intellectuals as a traditional category. This distinction poses a lot of problems. The analysis of the political party is the most interesting problem. Gramsci analyzes the relation between the intellectuals and the political party. For Gramsci, the political party “carries out in civil society the same function that the state carries out, to a greater extent, in political society. In other words, it secures the bonding of the organic intellectuals of a social group with traditional intellectuals . . .” (202). When an intellectual joins the political party of a particular social group, he mixes with the organic intellectuals of that group. When an intellectual takes part in the activities of the state, this blending does not happen. Gramsci warns that the individuals who think that they are the state can complicate matters for the state which Gramsci refers to as “the economic social group” (203). For Gramsci, all members of a political party are intellectuals. A party may have members from the higher or lower ranks. What is important is the function of these intellectuals. Their function is to educate and lead. This is an intellectual function. A businessman, an industrialist, a farmer do not join a political party to satisfy the needs of their profession. The professional unions of these professionals can satisfy their needs. A political party goes beyond the economic-corporate function of these professionals: “In the political party, the elements of an
economic social group go beyond this moment of their historical development and become agents of general activities that are national and international in character” (203).

In Notebook 8, §169, Gramsci focuses on the unity of theory and practice. He is critical of those who speak of theory as a “complement” of practice or an accessory. People can become independent when they unite and organize themselves. People cannot organize themselves without intellectuals or organizers. The process of creating intellectuals is lengthy and hard: “until the “mass” of intellectuals grows sufficiently (which means until the larger mass has attained a certain level of culture)—a separation will continually appear between the intellectuals (or some of them, or a group of them) and the great masses—hence the impression of accessory and complement” (330).

In Notebook 6, §10, Gramsci elaborates on the role of intellectuals. The intellectual cannot afford to remain aloof like Renaissance man when a large number of people are actively taking part in history: “the great intellectual too, must take the plunge into practical life and become an organizer of the practical aspects of culture, if he wants to remain a leader; he must democratize himself, be more in touch with the times” (7). Gramsci regrets the fact that the traditional intellectuals are detaching themselves from the social formations to which they gave complete consciousness of the state. Their detachment shows the current crisis of the state. Since these intellectuals lack the kind of organization possessed by the church, the modern crisis is more severe than the medieval crisis. The medieval crisis came to end with the French Revolution: “when the social grouping that had become the driving force in Europe after the year 1000 was able to present itself as an integral “state” with all the intellectual and moral forces that were necessary and adequate to the task of organizing a complete and perfect society” (9).

5. Subalternity and the Hegemony of the North over the South

In Notebook 1, §43, Gramsci analyzes the relationship between the city and the countryside. Gramsci observes that it is possible for the countryside to be more progressive than the city. An industrial city is generally more progressive than the countryside. In Italy, a direct relationship between urbanism and industrialization does not exist. Despite being the largest city in Italy, Naples is not an industrial city. Still, the kernel of a typically urban population resides in such cities: “In this type of city there exists an “urban” ideological unity against the countryside: there is still hatred and
contempt for the “country bumpkin”; there is a “generic” aversion of the country toward the city” (130). Gramsci thinks that the relationship between North and South during the Risorgimento was akin to the relationship between a great city and a great countryside. The relationship between North and South was not organic, but contained the seeds of national conflict.

During the Risorgimento, the South was always the first to respond to any political crisis. Gramsci cites the examples of Naples, Palermo, Messina and Sicily. In 1893, peasants revolted in Sicily as a result of an economic crisis. Organized peasants rebelled against the big landowners to demand land redistribution. In 1898, workers agitated in Milan to protest against high prices and food scarcity. In 1919, the land of big land owners was attacked by the peasants in Sicily. In 1920, industrial workers in the North took possession of the factories. Gramsci observes: “in periods of crisis, it is the weakest, most peripheral segment that reacts first” (130). The intellectuals of the South like Benedetto Croce and Giustino Fortunato started a counter cultural movement against futurism, the cultural movement of the North. Pirendello and Gentile belonged to the futurist movement. Gramsci defines the futurist movement as “an opposition to traditional classicism and as a form of contemporary “romanticism” (131). The structure of intellectuals is different in the South and the North. In the South, the function of an intellectual, e.g. lawyer, is to establish contact between the peasants and the landowners. In the North, the typical intellectual is the factory technician who serves as a link between the working class and the capitalist class. Trade-union organizers and political parties no longer serve as a link between the working class and the state.

Gramsci comments on the political programmes that existed in Italy before the rise of Fascism. The city-country relationship was obvious in these programmes. Giolitti’s liberal political programme was:

to create in the North an “urban” (capitalists-workers) bloc which would provide a base for the protectionist state to strengthen Northern industry, for which the South is a semi-colonial market. The South is “taken care of” with two systems (of measures): 1) a police system (relentless repression of every mass movement, periodic slaughter of peasants). . . . 2) political measures: personal favors to the ranks of caviling lawyers or hacks (public jobs, permission to plunder the public
administration, less rigid ecclesiastical legislation than in the North, etc., etc.); in other words, the incorporation on a "personal basis" of the most active Southern elements into the ruling classes through special "judicial," white collar privileges, etc., so that the system which could have organized Southern discontent became an instrument of Northern politics, its "police" accessory; thus, the discontent could not take on a political aspect and since it exhibited itself only in chaotic and riotous expressions, it fell into the "sphere" of the "police". Eminent men like Croce and Fortunato supported this phenomenon of corruption, even if only passively and indirectly through the fetishism of "unity." (131)

Gramsci defines intellectuals as "the whole social mass that exercises an organizational function in the broad sense, whether it be in the field of production, or culture, or political administration: they correspond to the noncommissioned and junior officers in the army . . ." (133). The social function of these intellectuals depends upon their attitude towards the masses. They may have a paternalistic attitude towards manual workers or they might think that they are a manifestation of them. They may have a servile attitude towards the ruling classes or they might think that they are leaders or members of the ruling class. Gramsci is critical of the Action Party because the Action Party had a paternalistic attitude and it failed "to bring the great masses into contact with the state. So called "transformism" is linked to this fact: the Action Party was incorporated molecularly by the Moderates and the masses were decapitated, not absorbed into the ambit of the new state" (133). The origin of the Action Party was in the republican and national liberation movement which was inspired by Mazzini. The Action Party was opposed to Cavour's plans to unify Italy under the leadership of Piedmont's monarchy. It was also opposed to the way Cavour dealt with the question of the Papal States. The Action Party broke up after 1870 as its members joined the Left and the Republican Party. The origin of the Moderate Party was in the neo-Guelph federalist movement. It was founded in 1848. Initially, it enjoyed great popularity because of the leadership of Cavour and Massimo d' Azeglio. It discarded its federalist principles and became the main political force in Cavour's efforts for the unification of Italy. The Moderate Party was a major political force in Italy till 1876. Later, the parliament was dominated by the Left. Gramsci admits that the Northern urban force exercised an
indirect leadership function. During the Risorgimento, the Northern urban force became successful in arousing the Southern progressive forces in its struggle against the foreign rule: “The Northern urban forces, therefore, had to make the Southern ones understand that their leadership function consisted necessarily in guaranteeing the leadership of the North over the South within the general city-country relation . . .” (134). The larger leadership function of the North became the leadership function of the South. Gramsci finds this contradictory because the Southern urban force ceased to be independent, and became part of the Northern urban force. Gramsci thinks that the important aspects of the national question did not arise as a result of the unequal relation between the Southern urban forces and the Northern urban forces. The result was the feeble position of the Southern urban forces in relation to the Southern rural forces. The Southern urban forces did not acquire a consciousness of their leadership function as a result of this unequal relationship. Gramsci observes that the Action party failed completely. Gramsci asks, “Why did the Action Party not pose the agrarian problem in all its enormity?” (135). Gramsci does not blame the Moderate Party for not posing the agrarian question as it was a coalition of the forces on the right. This coalition also comprised the big landowners. The Moderates were much bolder than the Action Party as they showed the courage to lay their hands on the religious congregations. Mazzini’s vain hope for a religious reform was not relevant to the masses. Gramsci cites the example of France. Robespierre’s attempts to launch a religious reform caused great damage to the Jacobins who had been successful in defeating the Girondins on the agrarian question (136). In Notebook 1, §74, Gramsci quotes Papini on the relationship between the city and the countryside: “The city does not create, but consumes. Just as it is the emporium into which flow the goods wrung out of the fields and the mines, so it is the place to which the freshest minds from the provinces and the ideas of great solitary men flock” (180). For Papini, the city does not produce; it only consumes.

In Notebook 1, § 44, Gramsci analyzes the complex feelings that were aroused in the North about the South:

The “poverty” of the South was “historically” inexplicable to the Northern popular masses: they did not understand that unity had not been created on a basis of equality, but as a hegemony of the North over the South in a city-country
territorial relation; in other words, that the North was a “parasite” which enriched itself at the expense of the South, that industrial development was dependent on the impoverishment of Southern agriculture. Instead they thought that if the South made no progress after being freed from the obstacles that Bourbon rule had placed in the way of modern development, this meant that the causes of the poverty were not external but internal; moreover, given the deep-seated belief in the great natural wealth of the land, there remained but one explanation: the organic incapacity of the people, their barbarity, their biological inferiority. These already widespread opinions (Neapolitan lazzaroni had long been legendary) were firmly established and even theorized by positivist sociologists (Niceforo, Ferri, Orano etc.), thus acquiring the validity of “scientific truths” at a time of scientific superstition. Hence there was a North-South polemic about race and about the superiority and inferiority of North and South....Meanwhile, the North persisted in the belief that the South represented Italy’s “dead weight,” the conviction that the modern industrial civilization of the North would have made greater progress without this “dead weight,” etc., etc. (143-144)

Gramsci throws light on this unequal relation between the North and the South in his essay, “Some Aspects of the Southern Question”. The bourgeois ideology was spread among the Northern proletariat by the Socialist Party. The party gave its blessing to the “Southernist” literature. The positivist school of writers like Ferri, Sergi, Niceforo, Orano and their followers created the stereotypes of the Southern people in their literary works (Buttigieg 1: 429).

6. War of Position and War of Manoeuvre or Frontal War

In Notebook 6, §136, Gramsci observes that Bronstein (Trotsky) can be considered as the political theorist of frontal assault or the war of manoeuvre (109). The basic thesis of Parvus-Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution was: “given the bourgeoisie’s inability to carry out its own revolution, the proletariat had to undertake the task itself and then proceed through “permanent revolution” toward the final goal of true socialism” (Buttigieg 1:442). The proletariat, despite being a minority in industrially backward Russia should take responsibility for provisional government. It should not wait for capitalist development in Russia under bourgeois rule which would create
conducive atmosphere for the revolution. Trotsky believed that the "permanent revolution" could fail if it does not spread throughout the West where the conditions were favorable. Socialism would be impossible to achieve in a backward country like Russia. There were debates for and against the concept of permanent revolution. Stalin believed that socialism in one country could succeed and criticized the concept of permanent revolution, but Bukharin believed that only world revolution could protect Russia from external threats that capitalist countries posed (442).

In Notebook 7, §16, Gramsci makes a distinction between the war of position and the war of manoeuvre. Gramsci observes that Ilyich (Lenin) "understood the need for a shift from the war of manoeuvre that had been applied victoriously in the East in 1917, to a war of position, which was the only viable possibility in the West . . ." (168). The war of manoeuvre became successful in Russia because there were no intermediaries between the revolutionaries and the oppressive Tsarist regime. As opposed to the East, civil society is a major intermediary between the state and the revolutionaries in the West. So the battlefield has decisively moved to civil society where the hegemony of the ruling class is protected and maintained by the institutions of civil society: "Whereas in undeveloped societies there was an absence of intermediaries, modern capitalist regimes have developed a tightly woven network of practices and institutions which guard against internal disintegration and make revolution a political and psychological impossibility" (Jones 31). The war of position is about turning the value-system of the society on its head and challenging the ideas and values of the ruling class in civil society: "In the East, the state was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West. . . . The state was just a forward trench; behind it stood a succession of sturdy fortresses and emplacements" (169). Only the war of position is relevant in the developed countries of the West where civil society is robust. The ruling class spreads its ideology through the institutions of civil society to establish hegemony over the subaltern classes. Commenting on Gramsci's concept of the war of position, Marcus Green observes:

Gramsci insists that subaltern groups engage in a "war of position" in which the subaltern promote a new set of social values as a counterforce to the dominant group's values in an attempt to take control of and promote a new conception of civil society. The war of position, in this sense, is the struggle for hegemony, and
the struggle for hegemony requires subaltern groups to construct a sociological force of their own that is capable of uniting the masses in a common political struggle (Notebook 10, § 44; 1971, 349). If the subaltern groups are successful in this struggle, they have the potential to become the next dominant groups and found a new state. . . . The subaltern, as a party, can work within the established political formations (fifth phase) obtaining positions as the personnel of the state, the government, and other institutions, while other members continue to promote a counterhegemony (Notebook 3, §119). Once the hegemonic struggle is won, the “war of movement” or sixth phase of development begins, in which the members of the party who are the personnel of the old state become the personnel and leaders of the new state. In other words, if the subaltern are going to promote a new hegemony and attempt to create a new state, they have to become a governing body and political and intellectual leaders within the old society before winning power, which requires “infinite masses of people” (Notebook 6, §138; 1971, 238-9). (21-22)

In Notebook 8, §52, Gramsci makes further comments on the distinction between the war of position and the war of movement. For Gramsci, the war of movement is precisely the concept of permanent revolution, and the war of position is associated with the concept of hegemony: “in politics, the war of position is the concept of hegemony that can only come into existence after certain things are already in place, namely, the large popular organizations of the modern type that represent, as it were, the ‘trenches’ and the permanent fortifications of the war of position” (267).

III Hegemony

Peter Barry defines hegemony as “an internalized form of social control which makes certain views seem ‘natural’ or invisible so that they hardly seem like views at all, just ‘the way things are’” (164-65). Commenting on the concept of hegemony, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin observe: “Fundamentally, hegemony is the power of the ruling class to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all. Domination is thus exerted not by force, nor even necessarily by active persuasion, but by a more subtle and inclusive power over the economy and over state apparatuses such as education and the media . . .” (116). For Jeremy Hawthorn, hegemony is “the maintenance of power
without the use, or direct threat, of physical violence; normally by a minority class whose interests are contrary to those over whom power is exercised” (146). Ania Loomba observes that Gramsci’s notion of hegemony stresses “the incorporation and transformation of ideas and practices belonging to those who are dominated, rather than simple imposition from above” (31). Hans Bertens brings out a distinction between Althusser’s concept of ideology and Gramsci’s concept of hegemony:

Gramsci’s ‘hegemony’ is far less inescapable than Althusser’s ideology, even if it, too, establishes and maintains itself through ‘civil society’ and employs cultural means and institutions. Under hegemonic conditions the majority—usually a large majority—of a nation’s citizens has so effectively internalized what the rulers want them to believe that they genuinely think that they are voicing their own opinion, but there is always room for dissent. Gramsci’s hegemony, although it saturates society to the same extent as Althusser’s ideology, is not airtight and waterproof. We can catch on to it and resist its workings with counterhegemonic actions even if we can never completely escape its all-pervasive influence. (88)

In Notebook 4, §38, Gramsci analyzes a moment of the political “relation of forces”. He examines the degree of homogeneity and self-consciousness attained by the various social groups in this moment. He divides this moment into various moments corresponding to the different levels of political consciousness that have been clearly shown in the history of the social groups. Gramsci identifies three moments: “The first and the most rudimentary is the primitive economic moment: a merchant feels himself in solidarity with another merchant, a manufacturer with another manufacturer, etc., but the merchant does not yet feel solidarity with the manufacturer” (179). In this moment, the members are aware of the unity of the professional group, but they have not yet attained the unity of the social group. Gramsci defines the second moment as “the one in which there is an attainment of consciousness of the solidarity of interests among all the members of the social group—but still in the purely economic sphere” (179). This is a politico-economic phase. The members of the group raise the question of the state, but in its elementary form. The members demand the right to take part in, change and reform administration and legislation within the established structure. For Gramsci, the third moment is most important. In the third moment: “one becomes conscious of the fact that
one's own "corporate" interests, in their present and future development, go beyond the "corporate" confines—that is, they go beyond the confines of the economic group—and they can and must become the interests of other subordinate groups" (179). The third moment represents the most "political" phase. It also indicates a transition from a structure to superstructures. In this phase, different ideologies clash with one another and one of them or a single combination of them begins to dominate. It results in intellectual and moral unity along with economic and political unity. A fundamental social group establishes its hegemony over the subordinate groups. The hegemonic group expands itself through the organ of the state. This expansion is seen as universal. It is "viewed as being tied to the interests of the subordinate groups, as a development of unstable equilibriums between the interests of fundamental groups and the interests of the subordinate groups in which the interests of the fundamental group prevail" (180). These interests exist up to a certain point and do not reach the stage of corporate economic selfishness.

Joseph Femia observes that Gramsci speaks of three types of hegemony. The first type of hegemony is integral hegemony. In this type of hegemony, the society shows a great degree of moral and intellectual unity. There is an organic relationship between the rulers and ruled. There are no contradictions or enmity between them. This situation can exist only in those historical periods in which there is an absence of well-planned and extensive opposition. The ruling class has a progressive function, and it causes the society to move ahead. Post-revolutionary France is an ideal example of this kind of hegemony which the proletariat can follow. The Jacobins took into account the aspirations and interests of the popular masses and made the bourgeoisie the leading, hegemonic class of the nation. The second type of hegemony is decadent hegemony. Gramsci observes that bourgeois economic dominance has become outdated. It is not capable of taking into account the interests of the masses. The possibility of the disintegration of the social structure is always present. There is no consonance between the ideas of the masses and the ideas of the dominant classes. The third type of hegemony is minimal hegemony. This kind of hegemony existed in Italy from the period of unification until the end of the century. This kind of hegemony is dependent upon the ideological unity of the elite classes. These classes do not approve of any participation of
the masses in state life. There is no harmony between the interests of these dominant economic classes and the interests of the masses. They maintain their hegemony through *transformismo* which is the practice of absorbing the leaders of the antagonistic groups into their network. A broader ruling class is formed this way. The antagonistic classes are given token representation in the institutions of power (46-47).

Chantal Mouffe states that hegemony is seen as the leadership of the proletariat over the peasantry according to Gramsci’s first conception. It is basically the Leninist conception of hegemony. Gramsci applies this concept of hegemony to the strategy of the proletariat. The proletariat can become the leading class if it succeeds in gaining the consent of the peasantry. Gramsci believes that the working class should free itself from corporatism so that it wins over the Southern intellectuals who can influence the peasantry. Since hegemony is thought of in terms of a class alliance, political leadership is an essential element of this conception. It was only later that Gramsci revised his conception of hegemony, and hegemony becomes the union of political and intellectual and moral leadership. Hegemony does not only mean a class alliance. Gramsci also uses hegemony to refer to the practices of the ruling classes in general. A dominant class rules the allied classes and dominates the antagonistic classes. Gramsci applies the concept of hegemony to the bourgeoisie in its second usage when he examines the role of the Jacobins in the French Revolution. The Jacobins made the bourgeoisie a hegemonic class by forcing it to widen its class interests (178-179). For Gramsci, a hegemonic class is a class which abandons a corporatist conception and takes into account the interests of those social groups over which it wants to exercise hegemony. This conception of hegemony also changes the economistic conception of the state. The state does not remain a coercive apparatus of the ruling class, but becomes the integral state which consists of dictatorship+hegemony. The integral state denotes “the incorporation of the apparatuses of hegemony, of civil society, to the state” (182).

1. *Transformism* and Passive Revolution

Gramsci observes that there are two methods by which a class can become hegemonic: the method of *transformism* and the method of expansive hegemony. Gramsci defines *transformism* as “the formation of a ruling class within the framework determined by the Moderates after 1848, with the absorption of the active elements that

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arose from the allied as well as from the enemy classes” (Buttigieg 1: 137). During the
Risorgimento, the Moderate Party used the method of *transformism* to secure its
hegemony over the antagonistic forces fighting for unification. Through this method, the
leaders of the opposition were absorbed and were given token representation in
government. This way, the interests of the masses were neutralized, and they were
prevented from opposing the interests of the ruling class. The Action Party was led by the
Moderates. The Moderates were successful in absorbing the top leaders of the Action
Party, and the leaders of the Action Party acted according the interests of the Moderates.
Gramsci calls this a “passive revolution”, a term which Gramsci borrows from V Cuoco.
Vincenzo Cuoco was an influential thinker in the early phase of the Risorgimento.
Although he advocated the creation of a national identity, he was a conservative and anti-
revolutionary thinker. Cuoco “characterized the Neapolitan rebellion as a “passive
revolution” because it was inspired and guided by abstract ideas imported from France by
the bourgeoisie and therefore lacked a mass or popular base” (422). The Risorgimento
was marked by an absence of mass participation. The Risorgimento was “a revolution
without revolution” (137). Gramsci contrasts this type of hegemony with expansive
hegemony. Expansive hegemony consists in “the creation of an active, direct consensus
resulting from the genuine adoption of the interests of the popular classes, which would
give rise to the creation of a genuine ‘national popular will’” (Mouffe 182-83). Vast
segments of the popular classes are excluded from the hegemonic system in the passive
revolution while the whole society must move forward in an expansive hegemony. The
interests of other social groups are neutralized in the passive revolution, and these social
groups are prevented from developing their own specific demands while the interests of
other social classes are articulated to promote their full development in an expansive
hegemony. Mouffe observes that the bourgeoisie can never become a truly hegemonic
class. The leading class should make economic and corporate sacrifices to exercise
hegemony over other classes. Since the bourgeoisie is an exploiting class, its class
interests would clash with those of the popular classes. Only the working class whose
interests coincide with those of the popular classes is able to bring out an expansive
hegemony (182-83).

2. Economism:
Gramsci observes that theoretical movement for free trade and theoretical syndicalism are the two components of economism. Theoretical movement for free trade belongs to a hegemonic group, and theoretical syndicalism belongs to a subaltern group. Two important aspects of syndicalism that Gramsci alludes to are "an insistence on the primacy of industrial struggle and a scorn for the role of the political party" (Buttigieg 2: 559). Gramsci was opposed to the syndicalist approach:

No mass action is possible if the masses themselves are not convinced of the goals they want to achieve and of the methods that need to be applied. In order to be able to become a governing class, the proletariat must rid itself of every residue of corporatism, every syndicalist prejudice and incrustation. What does this mean? It means that the distinctions that exist between one trade and another must be overcome. But not only: in order to win the trust and the consent of the peasants and of some semiproletarian urban categories, it is also necessary to overcome certain prejudices and to defeat certain forms of egoism that can and do subsist within the working class as such, even after the disappearance of narrow craft distinctions. The metalworker, the carpenter, the construction worker, etc., must not only think as proletarians and no longer as metalworker, carpenter, construction worker, etc., they must also take another step forward: they must think as workers who belong to a class that aims to lead the peasants and the intellectuals, a class that can be victorious and can build socialism only if it is helped and followed by the great majority of these social strata. If this is not achieved, the proletariat will not become the leading class and these strata—which in Italy represent the majority of the population—will remain under bourgeois leadership, thus enabling the state to resist the proletarian drive and wear it down. . . .” (557)

Gramsci is critical of the hegemonic group that insists on the distinction between political society and civil society and believes that economic activity belongs to civil society and political society must not intervene in its regulation: “the distinction is purely methodological and not organic; in concrete historical life, political society and civil society are a single entity” (182). Even the policy of laissez-faire is introduced by law which is an instrument of political power. Gramsci observes that theoretical syndicalism
prevents a subaltern group from becoming a dominant group. Theoretical syndicalism prevents the subaltern group from abandoning the economic-corporate phase as a result of which it does not move to the phase of intellectual hegemony in civil society, and it also does not become hegemonic in political society. Laissez-faire liberalism is used by the hegemonic group to change political society. It wants to modify the laws regarding commercial policy and indirectly, those regarding industrial policy. Theoretical syndicalism does not make the subaltern group independent and autonomous. On the contrary, the subaltern group is hegemonized by the dominant group as theoretical syndicalism is an aspect of laissez-faire liberalism. The subordinate group fails to become a dominant group because the issue is not raised at all or it is not raised in an effective manner. The subordinate group could also fall prey to the assertion that one can move from a divided social system to a social system of perfect equality. This, in the strict sense, is theoretical syndicalism. Commenting on hegemony, Gramsci writes: “the fact of hegemony presupposes that the interests and tendencies of those groups over whom hegemony is exercised have been taken into account. . . It presupposes, in other words, that the hegemonic group should make sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind” (183). For Gramsci, the sacrifices of the hegemonic group do not alter the core of economic activity. Hegemony is political and more importantly, it is economic. It has its material base in the decisive function exercised by the dominant group.

3. Force and Consent

In Notebook 1, §44, Gramsci analyzes the problem of the various political currents of the Risorgimento. Gramsci observes that a homogeneous class was represented by the Moderates, but the Action Party did not represent any historical class. The result was that the leadership of the Moderates did not waver while the leadership of the Action party swayed. Finally, the Action Party was led by the Moderates. Bringing out a distinction between leadership and dominance, Gramsci observes that there are two ways in which a class is dominant: “namely it is “leading” and “dominant”. It leads the allied classes, it dominates the opposing classes. Therefore, a class can (and must) “lead” even before assuming power; when it is in power it becomes dominant, but it also continues to “lead”’” (136-37). Commenting on political hegemony, Gramsci states: “There can and there must be a “political hegemony” even before assuming governmental
power, and in order to exercise political leadership or hegemony one must not count solely on the power and material force that is given by government” (137). This was evident in the politics of the Moderates. The Moderates represented the upper classes, so there was an organic relationship between the Moderates and the classes that they represented: “the Moderate intellectuals were a real, organic vanguard of the upper classes: they were intellectuals and political organizers and, at the same time, heads of business, great landowners-administrators, commercial and industrial entrepreneurs, etc.)” (137). The intellectuals of other classes who were scattered were spontaneously attracted towards the Moderates because of this organic concentration. Gramsci comments on this aspect:

There does exist an independent class of intellectuals, but every class has its intellectuals; however, the intellectuals of the historically progressive class exercise such a power of attraction that, in the final analysis, they end up by subordinating the intellectuals of the other classes and creating an environment of solidarity among all the intellectuals. . . . This phenomenon occurs “spontaneously” in periods during which that given class is truly progressive, that is, it pushes the whole society ahead, not only satisfying its existential needs but continuously enlarging its compass through the continual appropriation of new spheres of industrial-productive activity. Once the dominant class has exhausted its function, the ideological bloc tends to disintegrate, and then “spontaneity” is followed by “constraint” in forms which are less and less disguised and indirect, ending up in downright police measures and coups d'état. (137-38)

For Gramsci, the intellectuals of a progressive class subordinate the intellectuals of other classes as the intellectuals of the other classes find the values of a progressive class attractive. By adopting their values, they want to be associated with the progressive class. This period is a period of consent because the other classes spontaneously give consent to the hegemony of the progressive class. The dominant class is able to obtain the consent of the other classes because it takes into account the concerns and the interests of the other classes and does not stick to the interests of its own class. Once the dominant class exhausts this function, the next phase, the phase of coercion, begins. If the dominant
class feels that the other classes are not giving spontaneous consent to its rule, it begins to use coercion to keep its hegemony intact.

The Action Party failed to have this power of attraction as it was itself attracted to the Moderates. The leaders of the Action Party like Garibaldi had a personal relationship of subordination with the Moderates. The Action Party could not become an autonomous force as it could not incorporate the demands of the popular masses and the peasants in its programme: “to the “spontaneous” attraction of the Moderates it should have counterposed an “organized” attraction, according to a plan” (138). The Action party did not have a programme of government. It remained “an agitation and propaganda movement for the Moderates” (138). The outstanding leaders of the Action Party like Garibaldi and Felic Orsini felt contempt for Mazzini because political leadership was absent in the Party. Commenting on the failure of the Action Party, Gramsci observes: “The Action Party followed in the rhetorical tradition of Italian literature. It confused cultural unity with political and territorial unity. . . . the Jacobins struggled valiantly to secure the links between city and country; they were defeated because they had to repress the unrealistic class aspirations of the workers . . .” (139). In Notebook 1, §48, Gramsci states that the exercise of hegemony “is characterized by a combination of force and consent which balance each other so that force does not overwhelm consent but rather appears to be backed by the consent of the majority, expressed by the so called organs of public opinion” (156).

In Notebook 8, §86, Gramsci analyzes the concept of the “dual perspective” in political action and in the life of the state. The dual perspective is associated with the dual nature of Machiavelli’s Centaur. Machiavelli’s Centaur represents “force and consent” or “domination and hegemony”. Machiavelli writes in The Prince:

You should understand, therefore, that there are two ways of fighting: by law or by force. The first way is natural to men, and the second to beasts. But as the first way often proves inadequate one must needs have recourse to the second. So a prince must understand how to make a nice use of the beast and the man. The ancient writers taught princes about this by an allegory, when they described how Achilles and many other princes of the ancient world were sent to be brought up by Chiron, the centaur, so that he might train them this way. All the allegory
means, in making the teacher half beast and half man, is that a prince must know how to act according to the nature of both, and that he cannot survive otherwise. (Buttigieg 3: 585-86)

Joseph Femia’s comment on the concept of consent is instructive here. Femia states that consent given by a hegemonic group could also be passive. Consent “emerges not so much because the masses regard the social order as an expression of their aspiration as because they lack the conceptual tools, the ‘clear theoretical consciousness’, which would enable them effectively to comprehend and act on their discontent...” (43-44). Commenting on Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, Steve Jones observes that force and consent do not belong to different periods in the exercise of a group’s power. Force and consent are indivisible:

If consent is organized through civil society, then coercion is the responsibility of what Gramsci calls political society. He defines political society as the set of apparatuses which legally enforce discipline on those groups who do not give their consent during a normative period, and which dominate the whole of society in periods when consent has broken down. This suggests that the cultural, economic, and political aspects of hegemony are, in the last instance, always underpinned by the threat of violence. (50-51)

4. Jacobinism and the Action Party

Gramsci makes a comparative study of the Jacobins and the Action Party and arrives at the conclusion that the Jacobin spirit was missing in the Action Party: “the Jacobins won their function of leading party by means of struggle: they imposed themselves on the French bourgeoisie, leading it to a much more advanced position than it would have “spontaneously” wanted...” (Buttigieg 1: 147). The Jacobins succeeded in pushing the bourgeoisie forward with “kicks in the backside” (147). The bourgeoisie in France initially stuck to its corporate interests. The resistance of the old classes and the political activity of the Jacobins made this advanced section of the French society a hegemonic class. The Jacobins not only incorporated the interests of the French bourgeoisie in its programme but also considered the interests of the other social strata of the third estate. The language that the Jacobins used was concrete, not abstract. The
Jacobins recognized the need to destroy the antagonistic classes and make counterrevolution impossible. They also recognized the need “to enlarge the class interests of the bourgeoisie, discovering the common interests it shares with the other strata of the third estate, to set these strata in motion, lead them into the struggle . . .” (148). The rural population of the French society also understood that its interests were taken into account by the bourgeoisie. The Jacobins “not only founded the bourgeois state and made of the bourgeoisie the “dominant” class, but they did more. . . . they made of the bourgeoisie the leading hegemonic class, that is, they provided the state with a permanent base” (148). The coalition that the Jacobins built crumbled as the Jacobins remained grounded in class. The Chapelier law which repressed workers’ associations and the law of the maximum which was enacted to control the “maximum” level of food prices as well as wages were instrumental in breaking the coalition. Gramsci laments: “We do not find this Jacobin spirit, this will to become the “leading party,” in the Action Party” (148).

5. Popular Literature and Hegemony

In Notebook 3, §63, Gramsci observes that Italian literature has not been popular with the Italian masses, and Italian people find foreign authors more interesting than Italian authors: “In Italy the intellectuals are distant from the people, that is from the “nation,” and they are bound to have a caste tradition, a “bookish” and abstract tradition that has never been broken by a powerful popular or national political movement” (62). Gramsci sheds light on why Italians read popular and nonpopular foreign literature and do not show any interest in Italian literature. When Italians read foreign literature, they “undergo the hegemony of foreign intellectuals” (63). Since a moral and intellectual bloc is absent in Italy, Italians feel that they are closer to foreign intellectuals than to Italian intellectuals: “The intellectuals do not come from the people, they do not know the people’s needs, aspirations, and widely felt sentiments; instead, they are something detached, cut off from reality—a caste, that is” (63). The ideas of Italian people are shaped by foreign intellectuals as they read the works of foreign intellectuals only. The Italian intellectuals are detached from the people, from the nation. These intellectuals are more foreign than the foreigners for Italian people. Gramsci thinks that the secular
elements as well the Catholics have failed to cater to the needs of Italian people. The secular elements have failed “to embody a secular culture; because they have been incapable of creating a new humanism suited to the needs of the modern world; because they have represented a world that is abstract, narrow-minded, excessively individualistic, and egotistical” (64). Gramsci thinks that even Catholics have failed to arouse any interest in the minds of the people about Catholic books. These books are not popular in Italy as they are generally distributed at ceremonies, and these books are not read for pleasure, but as a form of punishment. The failure of Catholic popular literature to arouse interest in Italian people shows that “a deep rift now exists between religion and the people, who are in an extreme state of indifference, devoid of spiritual life; religion is only a superstition, but it has not been replaced by a new secular and humanistic morality because of the impotence of the lay intellectuals” (64). These intellectuals have failed to replace religion with a secular world-view and they have also not been able to transform or nationalize religion as it has happened in other countries. In Notebook 6, §38, Gramsci observes that Italian literature “is not tied to national-popular life but to caste-like groups uprooted from life, etc.” (29). A disjunction between writers and the public is making the public seek its literature abroad. The public thinks that foreign literature is closer to it than the national literature. Gramsci thinks that it is not necessary that people will find their literature within the same national community. They can find their literature from another people: “the people in question can be subordinated to the intellectual hegemony of other peoples. This is often the most shocking paradox for many monopolistic movements of a nationalistic and repressive character” (30). These people make great plans for their own hegemony, but they do not realize that they are subjected to foreign hegemonies. In Notebook 6, §73, Gramsci analyzes the relationship between popular literature and hegemony. Italian people find Italian books boring and find foreign books interesting. People working for nationalist revival feel that Italian literature is not “national”, i.e. it is not popular, and Italian people are subjected to foreign hegemony. Gramsci observes that the programmes and efforts to make Italian literature national would not gain anything. Gramsci writes: “What is needed is a merciless critique of tradition and a cultural, moral renewal that would give rise to a new literature. But that is
precisely what cannot take place because of the contradiction, etc.: that nationalist revival has come to mean the exaltation of the past" (53-54).

6. Church-State Relations

In Notebook 5, §55, Gramsci analyzes church-state relations. Gramsci states that the territorial and political unification of Italy did not occur prior to 1870. Italy had a cosmopolitan function during the period of the Roman Empire and during the Middle Ages. International relations were more important than national interests. The papacy was a universal spiritual monarchy. Italians understood that the power of the Church had to be restricted. Had the entire peninsula been under the power of the Church, a serious threat would have been posed to the independence of the European states: “Spiritual power can be respected, as long as it does not represent a political hegemony, and the entire period of the Middle Ages is full of struggles against the political power of the pope” (315). The Roman and medieval tradition of universality obstructed the growth of the national bourgeois forces in Italy: “the national “forces” did not become a national “force” until after the French Revolution and after changes in the position of the pope in Europe: a position that became irreparably subordinate because it was limited to and challenged in the spiritual arena by triumphant secularism” (315). In Notebook 6, §87, Gramsci analyzes Guicciardini’s assertion that arms and religion are absolutely necessary for the life of a state. Gramsci observes that this formula can be translated into various other formulas: “force and consent, coercion and persuasion, state and church, political society and civil society, politics and morals . . . law and freedom, order and discipline . . . violence and fraud” (74). During the Renaissance, religion was consent and church was civil society. The hegemonic group did not have its own intellectual and cultural organization. The church was their hegemonic apparatus.

7. Civil society and political society

In Notebook 6, §10, Gramsci compares and contrasts Gentile’s and Croce’s views on civil society and political society:

For Gentile, history is entirely history of the state, while, for Croce, it is “ethico-political.” In other words, Croce wants to maintain a distinction between civil society and political society, between hegemony and dictatorship; the great
intellectuals exercise hegemony, which presupposes a certain collaboration, that is, an active and voluntary (free) consent, in other words, a liberal-democratic regime. Gentile posits the (economic-) corporative phase as an ethical phase within the historical act: hegemony and dictatorship are indistinguishable, force is no different from consent; it is impossible to distinguish political society from civil society; only the state exists and, of course, the state-as-government, etc. (9-10)

In Notebook 6, §24, Gramsci makes a distinction between the two senses in which civil society is understood. The first meaning of civil society is as Hegel understands it. Gramsci also uses the same meaning. According to Hegel, civil society is “the political and cultural hegemony of a social group over the whole of society; as the ethical content of the state” (20). The second meaning of civil society is as Catholics interpret it. For Catholics, civil society is “political society or the state as opposed to the society of the family and of the church” (20-21). Catholics think that civil society as it is interpreted by Hegel is unnecessary: “In the Catholic conception, the state is just the church, and it is a universal and supernatural state” (21). In Notebook 7, §9, Gramsci makes a comment on Croce’s conception of ethico-political history. Ethical history is associated with civil society, with hegemony and political history is associated with state-governmental activity: “When there is a conflict between hegemony and the state-government, there is a crisis in society . . . sometimes the “state” . . . is not to be found . . . in the state as juridically understood; rather, it is to be found among “private” forces and at times even among so-called revolutionaries” (161).

In Notebook 7, §84, Gramsci observes that public opinion plays a great role in establishing political hegemony of a ruling group. Public opinion is closely linked to political hegemony. Public opinion acts as a point of contact between civil society and political society, between consent and force. The state begins to build public opinion in advance before it initiates an unpopular action. The collapse of the absolutist state as a result of the struggle of the new bourgeois class for political hegemony gave birth to public opinion as it is known today. Commenting on the role of public opinion, Gramsci states: “Public opinion is the political content of the public’s political will that can be dissentient; therefore, there is a struggle for the monopoly of the organs of public
opinion—newspapers, political parties, parliament—so that only one force will mold public opinion and hence the political will of the nation" (213). The dissenters are reduced to individual and disconnected voices.

Joseph Femia disagrees with Luciano Guppi’s interpretation of Gramsci’s concept of hegemony. For Guppi, hegemony includes ‘leadership’ and ‘domination’. Femia observes that this interpretation cannot be justified. For Gramsci, hegemony is ideological leadership, and Gramsci wants to counterpose it to the moment of force. When Gramsci refers to ‘political hegemony’, Gramsci refers to the consensual aspect of political hegemony. Femia refers to the famous letter that Gramsci wrote to his sister-in-law from prison in 1931. In this letter, Gramsci:

distinguishes between ‘political society (or dictatorship, or coercive apparatus, for the purpose of assimilating the popular masses to the type of production and economy of a given period)’ and ‘civil society (or hegemony of a social group over the entire national society exercised through so-called private organizations, such as the Church, the trade unions, the school, etc.)’ (25-26)

Joseph Femia states that Gramsci’s distinction between civil society and political society is analytical, and interpenetration between the two is possible. When the state wants to embark on an unpopular action, it creates in advance a suitable public opinion by organizing the elements of civil society. Governments can often manipulate the mass media and other ideological instruments because the elites who control these institutions of civil society have the same world-views. Gramsci is aware of the tendency towards increasing state intervention in civil society (27-28).

Perry Anderson argues that Gramsci has given three models of hegemony in his Prison Notebooks. In the first model, Gramsci brings out the difference between East and West. Gramsci wants to establish one important difference between Tsarist Russia and Western Europe—the presence of political democracy in the West and its absence in the East. In the East, the State is everything, and a war of manoeuvre is suitable in the East, whereas the State is just an outer trench of the inner fortress of civil society in the West, and a war of position is appropriate in the West. The State is the site where the bourgeoisie uses coercion to subjugate the exploited classes, and civil society is the site where the exploited classes give spontaneous consent to the hegemony of the ruling
classes. The opposition between State and civil society is the opposition between force and consent. Since civil society is more influential in the West, hegemony is used as the basic mode of bourgeois power in the West. Hegemony prevails over coercion; civil society prevails over state. The cultural supremacy of the ruling class maintains the stability of the capitalist order. By hegemony, Gramsci means, “the ideological subordination of the working class by the bourgeoisie, which enables it to rule by consent” (26). In the second model, civil society does not prevail over the State, and hegemony is distributed between State and civil society. Hegemony is exercised by civil society as well as the State. Gramsci was not happy with his first model of hegemony as he became aware of the central ideological role of the Western capitalist State. Gramsci chooses to focus on the subordinate institutions of the State, rather than the superordinate institutions. When Gramsci refers to the ideological functions of the State, he does not refer to parliament, a superordinate institution, but he selectively refers to education and law. The meaning of hegemony changes in the second model. Hegemony does not only mean cultural supremacy; it also includes coercion. Hegemony is characterized by a combination of force and consent. Anderson thinks that Gramsci commits an error here because coercion is a legal monopoly of the State. It is the State which has an army and a police. Hegemony as Coercion+Consent does not co-exist in civil society and the State. The use of repression is not present in civil society because it is the domain of the State. Civil society and the State share ideology, but violence belongs to the State alone. Gramsci might have thought about this model because fascist military squads operated freely outside the Italian State apparatus in 1920-22 (31-32). In the third model, the State includes political society and civil society. The State is not just governmental apparatus, but also the private apparatus of civil society. The State and civil society are identical. The concept of civil society as a separate unit vanishes. Gramsci realized that “the role of the State in some sense ‘exceeds’ that of civil society in the West” (33-34).

Norberto Bobbio traces the origin of the term, “civil society” and observes that Hegel makes a radical innovation in his Philosophy of Right: he uses the term “civil society” to mean pre-political society. Civil society meant political society according to his predecessors (27). Hegel includes in civil society “not only the sphere of economic relations and the formation of classes, but also the administration of justice as well as the
organization of the police force and that of the corporations, that is two facets of traditional public law” (28). Civil society is the intermediate stage between the family and the State. All the relations and pre-state institutions like family are not included in civil society. Hegel focuses on his critique of political economy and political science in civil society. For Marx, the State is subordinate to civil society which is the realm of economic relations. Civil society is a structural element. Civil society includes the whole commercial and industrial life, and it goes beyond the State. Gramsci introduces a major innovation with respect to Marx’s theory. Civil society in Gramsci is not a structural element, but a superstructural element. For Gramsci, civil society includes ideological and cultural relations; it does not include material relationships. Following the tradition of the philosophers of natural law, the State was what Hegel had stressed. Marx and Gramsci entirely reversed Hegel’s conception, and it is civil society that they stress. Civil society is a structural element for Marx, and it is a superstructural element for Gramsci. Gramsci derives his concept of civil society from Hegel, not from Marx. Hegel’s concept of civil society is a superstructural concept. By civil society, Gramsci means the political and cultural hegemony of a social group on the whole of society (28-31). Marx and Gramsci differ in the conceptions of the relations between structure and superstructure. For Marx, the structure is primary, and the superstructure is secondary while it is exactly the opposite in Gramsci. Gramsci was aware of the intricacy of the relations between structure and superstructure, and he was opposed to crude deterministic interpretations (33). Gramsci viewed Lenin as a theorist of hegemony. For Gramsci, hegemony means political and cultural leadership. The meaning of political leadership prevails in Lenin while the meaning of cultural leadership prevails in Gramsci. The moment of hegemony is primary for Gramsci, and the moment of force is primary for Lenin. For Gramsci, it is important to establish hegemony over the people before achieving governmental power while for Lenin the governmental power and hegemony go together or hegemony follows governmental power (40).

IV. Gramsci and the Subaltern Studies Collective

The Subaltern Studies group was formed by Ranajit Guha and had an editorial collective consisting of six scholars of South Asia. The first six volumes were edited by Guha. After he renounced the editorship, Subaltern Studies has been published by a
rotating two-member editorial team drawn from the collective. The aim of the group was
“to promote a systematic and informed discussion of subaltern themes in the field of
South Asian studies, and thus help to rectify the elitist bias characteristic of much
research and academic work in this particular area” (Guha vii). The group used the term
subaltern “as a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society
whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other
way” (vii). Guha refers to Antonio Gramsci in his preface to the first volume of Subaltern
Studies: “It will be idle of us, of course, to hope that the range of contributions to this
series may even remotely match the six-point project envisaged by Antonio Gramsci in
his ‘Notes on Italian History’” (vii). Guha uses the terms subaltern and dominance as
binary opposites and refers to Gramsci’s comment on subaltern groups: “subaltern groups
are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up”
(vii).

India,” observes that colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism dominated the
historiography of Indian nationalism. These two varieties were created as the ideological
product of British rule in India. According to these varieties of elitism, the making of the
Indian nation and the development of nationalism were solely considered as elite
achievements: “In the colonialist and neo-colonialist historiographies these achievements
are credited to British colonial rulers, administrators, policies, institutions and culture; in
the nationalist and neo-nationalist writings—to Indian elite personalities, institutions,
activities and ideas”(1). Guha is critical of nationalist historiography which represents
“Indian nationalism as primarily an idealist venture in which the indigenous elite led the
people from subjugation to freedom” (2). Elitist historical writing cannot explain Indian
nationalism: “For it fails to acknowledge, far less interpret, the contribution made by the
people on their own, that is, independently of the elite to the making and development of
this nationalism” (3). This kind of historiography could not understand the mass
articulation of nationalism and viewed this articulation as a law and order problem. The
participation of millions of Indians in nationalist activities was considered as a digression
from a genuine political process. This kind of historiography was not able to explain the
events like the anti-Rowlatt upsurge of 1919 and the Quit India movement of 1942 (3). Guha writes:

What clearly is left out of this un-historical historiography is the politics of the people. For parallel to the domain of elite politics there existed throughout the colonial period another domain of Indian politics in which the principal actors were not the dominant groups of the indigenous society or the colonial authorities but the subaltern classes and groups constituting the mass of the labouring population and the intermediate strata in town and country—that is, the people. This was an autonomous domain, for it neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter. (4)

Guha brings out a distinction between elite politics and subaltern politics during the Indian freedom struggle. Elite politics used vertical mobilization, and subaltern politics used horizontal mobilization. Elite politics depended on “the colonial adaptations of British parliamentary institutions and the residua of semi-feudal political institutions of the pre-colonial period; that of the latter relied rather more on the traditional organization of kinship and territoriality or on class associations . . .” (4). Elite mobilization used legal and constitutional means; subaltern mobilization used violence. Elite mobilization was marked by caution and control, and subaltern mobilization was marked by spontaneity. It was through peasant uprisings that subaltern mobilization was expressed (4-5). Guha believes that the co-existence of these two domains of politics “was an index of an important historical truth, that is, the failure of the Indian bourgeoisie to speak for the nation. There were vast areas in the life and consciousness of the people which were never integrated into their hegemony” (5-6). One can draw a parallel between the Action Party in Italy and the Indian bourgeoisie. The Action Party could not widen its class base and failed to integrate the interests of the peasantry into its programme. Similarly, the Indian bourgeoisie also failed to widen its class base:

It is the study of this historic failure of the nation to come to its own, a failure due to the inadequacy of the bourgeoisie as well as of the working class to lead it into a decisive victory over colonialism and a bourgeois-democratic revolution of either the classic nineteenth-century type under the hegemony of the bourgeoisie
or a more modern type under the hegemony of workers and peasants, that is, a ‘new democracy’—it is the study of this failure which constitutes the central problematic of the historiography of colonial India. (7)

Guha, in his essay, “Gramsci in India: homage to a teacher”, observes that Gramsci’s thought took root in an academic project like Subaltern Studies rather than taking root in the two official communist parties of India. In its urge to learn from Gramsci, the project is on its own and owes nothing to the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI (M)). Neither of these parties used Gramsci in their policies. Gramsci’s name was not known to their leaders until 1964. The project kept a distance from both of these parties as both embodied a left-liberal extension of the Indian elite classes (289). Guha uses Gramsci’s concepts of State and civil society to study the colonial and the postcolonial state. The state which was the main apparatus of colonial domination was passed on to the successive government after the end of colonial rule. Even after the Indian rulers assumed power, the misery experienced under the British rule did not diminish. The Indian rulers kept a distance from the people with whom they had fought to gain independence. This distance was similar to the distance between the British and the Indians during the colonial period. Guha uses Gramsci’s theory of hegemony to analyze the similarities between the colonial state and the sovereign national state (291). The British rule in India was a dominance without hegemony: “the only equality recognized by the rulers was the common subalternity of the entire people subjugated by it. The liberal-nationalists, on their part, used this very common subalternity to mobilize the people in an anti-imperialist struggle under Gandhi’s leadership” (293). Gandhi was opposed to any form of class conflict and insisted on keeping the struggle united. However, after the nationalist leadership came to power, this common subalternity could not prevent the outbreak of discontent in India. The reason is that many-sided divisions between the subaltern and the elite in civil society had existed in India before the British came, and nationalism came into being (293-94). As soon as the British left and the nationalist elite came to power, the unity fell apart: “the leadership that had been empowered by the consent of the people in the movement for independence failed to invest that consent into a hegemony as leaders of the new sovereign state” (294). The Indian nation-state, like the British, became a
dominance without hegemony. The Indian ruling elite could not maintain the hegemony after independence. The difference between elite mobilization and subaltern mobilization that had existed during the colonial period was the cause of this failure. Elite mobilization led by Gandhi and the Indian National Congress was highly disciplined and parliamentary while subaltern mobilization was unparliamentary (294). According to the elite nationalist leaders, subaltern mobilization was too spontaneous and unorganized. Subaltern mobilization was regarded with suspicion, and the elite nationalist leaders kept a distance from it: “This structural split between the elite and subaltern streams of mobilization was what made it impossible for the nationalist leaders to pick up the full measure of popular consent for the construction of hegemony after their accession to power” (295).

Dipesh Chakrabarty, in his essay, “Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Historiography,” responds to the criticism of Subaltern Studies by Marxist historians. Chakrabarty first discusses Arif Dilrik’s comment on the Subaltern Studies Collective. Arif Dilrik observes that the innovations of the Subaltern Studies historians were mere applications of methods used by British Marxist historians:

Most of the generalizations that appear in the discourse of postcolonial intellectuals from India may appear novel in historiography of India but are not discoveries from broader perspectives....the historical writing(s) of Subaltern Studies historians. . . . represent the application in Indian historiography of trends in historical writings that were quite widespread by the 1970s under the impact of social historians such as E P Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, and a host of others. (10)

Dipesh Chakrabarty identifies three areas in which Subaltern Studies differed from English Marxist historiography. Subaltern Studies involved “(a) a relative separation of the history of power from any universalist histories of capital, (b) a critique of the nation-form, and (c) an interrogation of the relationship between power and knowledge (hence the archive itself and of history as a form of knowledge)”(15). Marxist historiography treated peasant revolts as pre-political movements showing backward consciousness. Guha insists that the peasant in colonial India was an important part of
modernity. The peasant understood his contemporary world rightly. Replying to Anil Seal’s dismissal of nineteenth century revolts in India as having no political content, Guha argues that every peasant revolt was a struggle on the part of peasants to destroy all symbols of social prestige and power of the hegemonic classes. The peasants inverted the codes of dress, speech, and behavior through which the hegemonic classes exploited them. The peasants fought for prestige. They used inversion as their principal weapon. The peasants destroyed the signs of their antagonist’s power, thereby destroying the signs of their own subalternity (16-17). Marxists also object to the postmodern valorization of the fragment in subaltern historiography as it hurts the cause of the unity of the oppressed. Replying to this objection, Subaltern Studies historians observe: “the public sphere—in India and elsewhere—has fragmented under the pressure of democracy anyway; it cannot be united artificially by a Marxism that insists on reducing the many diverse experiences of oppression and marginalization to the single axis of class” (26).

Chakrabarty, in his Provincializing Europe, observes: “Subaltern pasts . . . do not belong exclusively to socially subordinate or subaltern groups, nor to minority identities alone. Elite and dominant groups can also have subaltern pasts to the extent that they participate in life-worlds subordinated by the “major” narratives of the dominant institutions” (101).

Gyan Prakash, in his essay, “Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism,” observes that Guha wanted to rectify elitist bias in colonialist and nationalist historiography because the elites had exercised dominance, not hegemony, in Gramsci’s sense over the subalterns (1477). Since the Subaltern Studies relocates subalternity in the operation of dominant discourse, the critique of the modern West becomes imperative: “For if the marginalization of “other” sources of knowledge and agency occurred in the functioning of colonialism and its derivative, nationalism, then the weapon of critique must turn against Europe and the modes of knowledge it instituted” (1483). Non-Western societies are subalternized by the hegemony of Europe as history. History which is authorized by European imperialism and the Indian nation-state makes certain forms of knowledge powerful while weakening other forms of knowledge (1485). Prakash states that Subaltern Studies has moved away from its original goal of recovering the subaltern autonomy, and the position of the subaltern is now used to rethink the discipline of history (1489). Gyan Prakash argues that Subaltern Studies “obtains its force as
postcolonial criticism from a catachrestic combination of Marxism, poststructuralism, Gramsci and Foucault, the modern West and India, archival research and textual criticism (1490).

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's Concept of the Subaltern

In her essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that the West is trying to conserve the subject of the West. While western intellectuals claim to critique the sovereign subject, they inaugurate the subject. She analyzes the text, *Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze*, to illustrate this point (271-72). Spivak observes that Foucault and Deleuze do not make a distinction between two senses of representation which Marx makes:

representation as “speaking for,” as in politics, and representation as “re-presentation,” as in art or philosophy. Since theory is only “action,” the theoretician does not represent (speak for) the oppressed group. Indeed, the subject is not seen as a representative consciousness (one re-presenting reality adequately). (275)

These two senses of representation are discontinuous. By covering over this discontinuity, the subject is paradoxically privileged. According to Foucault and Deleuze, the oppressed can speak for themselves. Spivak asks them the following question: “On the other side of the international division of labour from socialized capital, inside and outside the circuit of the epistemic violence of imperialist law and education supplementing an earlier economic text, can the subaltern speak?” (283). Foucault and Deleuze ignore the epistemic violence of imperialism.

Commenting on the essay, Stephen Morton observes that Spivak draws a parallel between the radical claims of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze to speak for the oppressed classes and the claims of British colonialists to save Indian women from the practice of *sati* in India. The point of comparison is to stress how the radical western intellectual can ironically silence the subaltern by claiming to speak for them in the same way the British colonialists claimed to speak for the widow. By claiming to speak for subaltern groups, they actually appropriate the voice of the subaltern. Foucault and Deleuze obliterate their role as intellectuals when they represent the subaltern groups. They have shown in their theory that subjects are constructed through discourse and
representation, but they use a transparent model of representation while discussing real instances and believe that the subaltern can speak for themselves. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx describes small, peasant owners in nineteenth-century France. These peasants do not represent a coherent class and lack class consciousness. A political representative describes the absent collective consciousness of the small peasant owner and represents the peasant owners. This representation has two meanings for Marx. Marx uses the terms in German to make a distinction between these two meanings. The first term is *darstellen* which means “representation as aesthetic portrait” and the second term is *vertreten* which means “representation by political proxy” (56-57). Spivak observes that these two meanings of representation are combined in the Foucault-Deleuze conversation:

> For in the constitution of disempowered groups as coherent political subjects, the process of (aesthetic) representation is subordinated to the voice of the political proxy who speaks on their behalf. As a consequence of this conflation, the aesthetic portrait—symbolically representing disempowered people as coherent political subjects—is often taken as a transparent expression of their political desire and interests. (58)

Spivak refers to Gramsci’s work on the subaltern classes. Spivak is critical of the idea of the phased development of subaltern classes proposed by Gramsci: “Yet an account of the phased development of the subaltern is thrown out of joint when his cultural macrology is operated, however remotely, by the epistemic interference with legal and disciplinary definitions accompanying the imperialist project” (Spivak 283). Spivak argues that imperialism complicates the phased development of the subaltern. She touches upon the question of the woman as subaltern to illustrate the point. Spivak observes that the Subaltern Studies group also confronted the same proposition. She wants them to ask the question: Can the subaltern speak? (283). Spivak is critical of the distinction between Indian elite and subaltern classes that Guha makes: “But one must nevertheless insist that the colonized subaltern subject is irretrievably heterogeneous” (284). Guha homogenizes the category of the subaltern and is not attentive to the fracturing of the subaltern by caste and gender. Spivak is critical of Guha’s search for
subaltern consciousness and observes that the programme of the Subaltern Studies is essentialist and taxonomic:

For the “true” subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself; the intellectual’s solution is not to abstain from representation. The problem is that the subject’s itinerary has not been traced so as to offer an object of seduction to the representing intellectual....How can we touch the consciousness of people, even as we investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak? (285)

Spivak observes that Pierre Macherey’s formula for the interpretation of ideology can be used to analyze texts. The archival and historiographic work can be undertaken for the task of measuring silences: “When we come to concomitant question of the consciousness of the subaltern, the notion of what the work cannot say becomes important” (287). Spivak discusses the question of the colonized female and states that this woman is doubly oppressed: “both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (287). Spivak is opposed to a nostalgia for lost origins which can be detrimental to the exploration of social realities within the critique of imperialism (292). For Spivak, the question of “woman” is important for the construction of the subaltern: “Clearly, if you are poor, black, and female you get it in three ways” (294).

Spivak discusses the practice of sati or widow sacrifice to study the construction of the female subaltern. According to the practice of sati, the Hindu widow ascends the funeral pyre of her husband and immolates herself. The British abolished this rite in 1829, and it was understood as a case of “White men saving brown women from brown men”. The argument of Indian nativists was: “The women actually wanted to die.” In these two statements, the testimony of the women’s voice consciousness is absent (297). The British colonialists saw the protection of woman as “a signifier for the establishment of a good society” (298). The abolition of the practice of sati was part of the civilizing mission of the British. The ritual was made a crime. On the other hand, the colonial elite
romanticized the purity, strength, and love of these women (301). Spivak cites a verse in which the woman’s free will in self-immolation is located: “As long as the woman (as wife: stri) does not burn herself in fire on the death of her husband, she is never released (mucyate) from her female body (strisarir—i.e., in the cycle of births)” (303). The figure of the woman is lost between patriarchy and imperialism: “There is no space from which the sexed subaltern can speak” (307).

Spivak develops her argument further by giving an example of Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri, a young woman of sixteen or seventeen. Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri hanged herself in her father’s apartment. It was not a case of illicit love as she was menstruating at that time. After a decade, it came to light that she was a member of an armed group fighting for freedom from the British. She had been given the task of a political assassination. As she could not perform the task, she hanged herself. Bhuvaneswari waited for the onset of menstruation as she knew that people would think that illicit love forced her to commit suicide. Spivak observes:

(Bhuvaneswari) perhaps rewrote the social text of sati-suicide in an interventionist way. . . . The displacing gesture—waiting for menstruation—is at first a reversal of the interdict against a menstruating widow’s right to immolate herself; the unclean widow must wait, publicly, until the cleansing bath of the fourth day, when she is no longer menstruating, in order to claim her dubious privilege. (307-8)

Benita Parry suggests that an absolute power is given to the hegemonic discourse in Spivak’s theory of subaltern silence. In response to Parry’s criticism, Spivak observes that it is fallacious to assume that native cultures were left intact through colonial rule, and can be recovered now. She warns against a nostalgia for lost origins. For Parry, anti-colonial nationalism is a symbol of the native ability to challenge colonial discourses. For Spivak, anti-colonial nationalism cannot represent the subaltern voice because the category of the subaltern cannot be homogenized. The natives were divided in terms of caste, class and gender (Loomba 235).

In The Trajectory of the Subaltern in My Work, Spivak defines subalternity as opposition without identity. For Spivak, no one can say ‘I am a subaltern’ in whatever language. Subalternity cannot be established again and again by narrating in a certain sort
of positivist historical way the details of the practice of disenfranchised groups. Spivak did not come to the theory of the subaltern from Gramsci. She had read Gramsci separately. She had read Ranajit Guha’s essay, “On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India,” a year before publishing the essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak observes that the subaltern and people, exchangeable words in that essay, is the name of a differential space. Spivak defines subaltern as ‘without access to the lines of social mobility’. A woman in the essay is an example. Like Subaltern Studies historians, she also questions colonial, nationalist and Marxist historiography in the essay. For Spivak, subalternity is in binary opposition to the nation-state and the international civil society. According to Spivak, there are no subaltern nations. The problems that the essay discusses are a) the problem of subjectship and agency and b) the call to build infrastructure in the colloquial, not the Marxist sense, so that agency would emerge. Spivak does not propose sati as resistance against the British and believes that the abolition of sati was an unquestioned good. The essay is critical of the British colonialists as well as the Hindus. Spivak’s point is that woman’s subject formation was not touched by the abolition of sati, so the reform could not last. By waiting for menstruation, this woman was protesting against contemporary gendering. By hanging herself, Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri was also moving against the practice of sati, because you could not become a sati if you were menstruating. Women in the family could not read this gesture as resistance at all. Spivak states that the subaltern speaking in other than words was the business of “Can the subaltern speak?” Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri committed suicide rather than speaking.